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Pine County sheriff 'will not enforce' further federal gun regulations

On a day when President Obama was preparing a slate of proposals to stem gun violence in America, Pine County Sheriff Robin Cole said he would consider any new federal regulation on guns to be illegal and would "refuse to carry it out."

By: **Mike Creger**, Duluth News Tribune

On a day when President Obama was preparing a slate of proposals to stem gun violence in America, Pine County Sheriff Robin Cole said he would consider any new federal regulation on guns to be illegal and would "refuse to carry it out."

"We will not enforce that," Cole told the News Tribune of any potential federal regulation that could lead to confiscation of firearms.

Obama is expected to announce proposals today including limits on the sale of assault weapons and strengthening background checks, but not confiscating existing guns.

Cole's position first appeared Tuesday in an open letter he sent to residents of the east-central Minnesota county, disseminated through the media. The sheriff said he made the statement in response to questions from his constituents who are scared about potential new gun laws. Cole said it took him a month to craft the response. The letter outlines his contention that the Second Amendment on the right to bear arms is "fundamental to our individual freedoms and that firearms are part of life in our country."

"We have been inundated," Cole said of questions about gun laws since the Newtown, Conn., massacre in December.

Pine County Commissioner Doug Carlson said he wasn't surprised to hear about Cole's stand, calling the sheriff "opinionated."

"Here's a sheriff riding cowboy saying he's going to do what he's going to do," Carlson said.

"Is he going to put us on a county level in a liable position?" Carlson asked, about local law enforcement versus the federal government. "If he can do that, where does that put us as a county board?"

But Commissioner Mitch Pangerl said he agrees with the sheriff.

"We're still the state of Minnesota," he said. He said that if the state legislative process comes up with a new law, it should be followed. But he's wary of crossing the Second Amendment, even though he knows he doesn't have much say as a County Board member.

"I will protect those rights," Pangerl said.

A ban on assault weapons would be the biggest change for Minnesotans. Right now, a purchase permit is required for handguns and assault weapons. Those permit applications can go through a retailer or a local police office for background checks. In most of Pine County, the only place to go to is the sheriff's office.

Cole said Tuesday he's simply providing reassurance to his constituents.

"They're afraid," Cole said. "When they're afraid, you can't reason with that."

Cole wrote that states' rights should supersede any attempts by an individual or the federal government to curb gun rights. The letter states that he will not accept any legislation from the federal government or any one individual, hinting at the notion that President Obama could approve some gun law changes by executive order.

"We enforce state law," Cole said.

In the letter, Cole states: "I believe current state law is sufficient to protect public safety."

He goes on to write: "I do not believe the federal government or any individual in the federal government has the right to dictate to the states, counties or municipalities any mandate, regulation or administrative rule that violates the United States Constitution or its various amendments."

The Minnesota Sheriff's Association doesn't have an opinion on new gun legislation, its executive director, Jim Franklin, said. He hadn't seen Cole's letter and said he couldn't comment.

Cole isn't alone among sheriffs across the nation. In recent days, sheriffs in Oregon, Georgia, Arizona and Kentucky have taken similar stances.

Cole said he wrote the letter for his constituents and it's his opinion alone.

"I don't care what other sheriffs agree with," he said.

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